

GM Food Newsletter

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New Clothes for Packs of Soya Milk

One night, in a supermarket, there were noises coming out from the shelves at one of the corners. What was happening ?



- Soya milk A :** Look! There are some packs of soya milk which look different from us. They were just put on the shelf today.
- Soya milk B :** Oh, yes. Why do they have a different look?
- Soya milk C (the new comer) :** Hello! Nice to meet you!
- Soya milk A & B :** We don't know you. Who are you? Why do you have these additional words in your package?
- Soya milk C :** Ohhh... it seems that you really don't know. I am made from soya beans that were genetically modified. The Government has issued a set of Guidelines on Voluntary Labelling of Genetically Modified (GM) Food and the boss of the factory has adopted such guidelines. You can see from the list of ingredients of mine that the words "genetically modified" appear in brackets just following the name of soya bean. The buyers can tell straight away that I contain GM material.
- Soya milk B :** Wait a moment. I know that the World Health Organization has stated that those GM foods currently available in the international market have passed safety assessments and are not likely to present risks for human health. So why do you have to put on the GM label?
- Soya milk C :** The GM label aims to address the issue of consumers' right to know, but it does not imply that we are less safe than the conventional ones.
- Soya milk A :** Ah. It seems that you are very familiar with the Guidelines. Can you tell us some more?
- Soya milk C :** My pleasure. If any ingredient in a food has 5% or more genetic materials being genetically modified, it is recommended to be labelled as "genetically modified".

Soya milk B : I see.

Soya milk C : If you are significantly different from the conventional food, it is also recommended to provide such information. For example, if there are significant changes in our composition or nutritional value, it is recommended that such information to be made available to our buyers.

Soya milk A : Oh, it seems that the Guidelines are very comprehensive. What about the canned corn kernel over there which has put on a "GM free" label? Do the Guidelines give any instruction about such label?

Soya milk C : The word "free" means that the product does not contain any GM material at all. However, since there is a possibility of unintentional mixing of genetically modified crops with those which are not, a truly "GM free" status is very difficult to attain. Therefore, such absolute terms are not recommended to be used as this may mislead the consumers. I heard from the shopkeeper that the canned corn kernel will be sent back to the factory for re-labelling.

Soya milk A : Really? So, which wordings can be used?

Soya milk C : They can put on a declaration that they are from non-GM source, but the manufacturer should have appropriate documentation to substantiate such declaration. I also know that making false claims on food product is an offence.

Soya milk B : Oh, I still have a question. I know that the packs of apple juice on the next shelf are not GM. Can they put on the "non-GM" label?

Soya milk C : The Guidelines don't recommend them to put on such "non-GM" label. As there are no "GM apples" available in the market at present, if they put on the "non-GM" label, it may imply that there are GM apples in the market.

Soya milk A : Thanks for your explanation. Meanwhile, I am worried that we need to go back to the factory for re-labelling in order to be in-line with the Guidelines.

Soya milk C : Don't worry. I heard that the boss of your factory has decided that they would let you run out of stock.

Soya milk A : Oh. It's good news.

Soya milk B : Shhhh... the shopkeepers are back. Back to the shelf! Quick! Quick!



For more information on GM food, please visit our website

www.fehd.gov.hk/safefood/gmf/index1.html